

First Place
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Let us stop for awhile today. Stop and think in honesty and brevity upon the foundation of this country, and what we have become. Community takes on a new meaning in the 21st century than it has in the past. There is proliferation of the Internet, online networking and communities now nearly overshadowed our own nascent relationships in the tangible world. Activism wanes in the face of overwhelming complacency and fear and as sad truth emerges of an apathetic nation, of an apathetic people.

Hope is an old concept. Action is lofty goal. Effort is difficult. One or twice, the American people get a little upset by the egressions of our ever increasing problems; but in the end our new century is marked by a distinct lack of action on the part of normal, everyday people. If, as idealists, we wish to affect change ... we, as an individual, and as a while, change ourselves. The freedom we so fought for under the 230 year history of this nation has given America a unique position in the world, and in itself. The equality and ideals that we fought for and won as recently as the 1960s must not be forgotten.

Caring does not come on a whim unfortunately, or in the annals of any speech or essay. Caring is a truth that we must strive within ourselves to create, and through the creation destroy those all too common traits of apathy and complacency. Personal responsibility must come before we can have community and fulfill those dreams rooted in equality and empathy. What needs to be done, and what must be done, will never succeed unless one person changes. And after that one person effects change within themselves, beginning thus to care about their other human brethren in earnest, another person shall change themselves, and then another and another, until such a time as when we look upon the community, we will notice that it is not the same as what we once knew to be so inadequate.

When a teacher cares about their students, it makes a difference ... but not nearly as prevalent a change when a student cares about his education. One can have a thousand "friends" on an internet networking site, but not one of those can love you like a friend at your side. Committees and politicians may cut taxes for the entire country, but no empty gesture can match kind words for an understanding heart. And as we enter a new century on the auguries of chaos and crisis, every man and woman, regardless of religion, color, social status and situation, must stop to think and reflect for a moment. When they finish, I hope that even one of them has found it in their heart to care and change themselves; for in doing so, we change the world.

